

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 SAB-01 L-03 MCT-01 PM-04 NSC-05

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USIA-06 PRS-01 /060 W

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P R 072210Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9998

INFO PANCANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 8316

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PN

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS IN PANAMA

REF: STATE 288435

1. FULL EMBASSY COMMENTARY ON DOCUMENT "PANAMANIAN COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS" BEING SENT CLASSIFIED POUCH DECEMBER 10. WE HAVE DEALT ONLY WITH ALLEGED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN DOCUMENT (PP. 1-10) AND NOT POLITICAL QUESTIONS. RESPONSE BASED ON INFORMATION FROM U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES, EMBASSY FILES AND DISCREET INQUIRIES.

2. IN SUMMARY OUR RESEARCH REVEALS THAT MOST OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ALLEGED IN THE DOCUMENT OCCURRED IN PERIOD 1968-71. GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO ELIMINATE TERRORIST GROUPS IN PANAMA AT THAT TIME RESULTED IN DECLINE OF OPEN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT AND A CORRESPONDING DECREASE IN ACCUSATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. IN JANUARY AND SEPTEMBER 1976, THERE WERE POLITICAL DISTURBANCES WHICH LED GOP TO EXILE A NUMBER OF PANAMANIAN.

3. PANAMA CAN PRESENTLY BE CHARACTERIZED AS A FAIRLY OPEN SOCIETY; AND IN GENERAL PANAMANIAN ENJOY THE GUARANTEES OF LIFE, LIBERTY AND SECURITY OF PERSON.

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BUT OPPOSITION WHICH SEEMS AIMED AT OVERTHROW OF THE

REGIME IS NOT PERMITTED. WHEN TORRIJOS REGIME HAS FELT ITS POSITION THREATENED, IT HAS RESORTED TO THE EXILE OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS. EXILES REPRESENT THE FULL POLITICAL SPECTRUM, FROM PDP (COMMUNIST) MEMBERS TO CONSERVATIVE BUSINESSMEN. PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS AND POLICE HAVE BEEN, AND CONTINUE TO BE, GUILTY OF OCCASIONAL ABUSES OF AUTHORITY. ON A VERY FEW OCCASIONS THESE ABUSES HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN FLAGRANT. BUT AT NO TIME HAS THE TORRIJOS GOVERNMENT MADE A PRACTICE OF ARBITRARY IMPRISONMENT, TORTURE OR MURDER FOR POLITICAL OR ANY OTHER PURPOSES. WE KNOW OF NO INDIVIDUALS PRESENTLY IMPRISONED FOR POLITICAL OFFENSES.

4. WE HAVE NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON THE DOCUMENT'S AUTHORSHIP, THOUGH AN AMERICAN SOURCE WHO ORIGINALLY SUPPLIED IT TO THE EMBASSY, SAID IT WAS WRITTEN BY PANAMANIAN EXILES IN MIAMI AND GIVEN TO HIM BY ANTI-TORRIJOS EXILES ATTENDING INTER-AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION MEETING IN WILLIAMSBURG. IT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED AND CIRCULATED IN PANAMA.

5. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT AS MUCH SPECIFIC INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE BE GIVEN TO CONGRESSMAN FRASER. SUBSTANCE OF THIS CABLE MAY BE USED IN PREPARING A RESPONSE TO FRASER. BECAUSE OF SENSITIVITY OF MUCH OF THE SPECIFIC DATA IN OUR POUCHED SUBMISSION, WE REQUEST THAT THE DEPARTMENT CONSOLIDATE AND SUMMARIZE THOSE PORTIONS WHICH WE HAVE CLASSIFIED. WE WILL BE HAPPY TO CONSIDER DECLASSIFICATION OF ANY PORTION OF THE REPORT WHICH DEPARTMENT MAY CONSIDER PARTICULARLY PERTINENT FOR ITS REPLY.

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